

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 180

By Johnson C

A RESOLUTION to honor Eddie Sherlin upon his many accomplishments in basketball and throughout his community.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in recognizing a gentleman who helped break down racial barriers in his community through the unifying force of high school basketball; and

WHEREAS, Eddie Sherlin was Gallatin High School's star basketball player during the 1969-1970 season and led the State in scoring with an amazing 33.5 points per game average, this before the advent of the three-point shot; many pundits have compared him favorably to NBA great Stephen Curry because of his shoot-from-anywhere mentality; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from high school, Mr. Sherlin refused a scholarship offer to play three sports at the University of Tennessee after he was drafted by MLB's Pittsburgh Pirates; and

WHEREAS, today, Mr. Sherlin is still an active force in the Gallatin community, but it is his role in a long-ago high school basketball game and its aftermath that has cemented his legendary status in community race relations; and

WHEREAS, on February 28, 1970, Eddie Sherlin and his teammates at Gallatin faced off against his secret friend, Bill Ligon, and his teammates at Union High School for the District 20 Championship in Springfield; and

WHEREAS, the Gallatin student body was exclusively white at the time, and Union was the segregated all-Black high school in the county; and

WHEREAS, the two teams had never played each other prior to the title game; in fact, they would never face off again, as Sumner County Schools were integrated in the fall of 1970, and Union was closed; and

WHEREAS, this much-anticipated and greatly hyped championship game drew a capacity crowd, with another 200 would-be attendees relegated to outside the gym; and

WHEREAS, in addition to Eddie Sherlin, both schools had extremely talented players, but Union was especially loaded; seven players on that final Union team played collegiate basketball, including Bill Ligon, who played for Vanderbilt University and was drafted by the Detroit Pistons in the 1974 NBA draft; and

WHEREAS, the title game was a close one, with the score tied at halftime; unfortunately for Union, Eddie Sherlin exploded in the second half, scoring nineteen points (thirteen of them in the fourth quarter) to cement the victory for Gallatin by a score of 74-60; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Ligon and Mr. Sherlin, who was the game's leading scorer with twenty-seven points, were both deservedly named to the All-Tournament Team for their outstanding performance; and

WHEREAS, the loss was especially emotional for Mr. Ligon and his teammates because they knew that this had been Union's final chance at a district title; and

WHEREAS, as the two young men met at midcourt after the game, Mr. Sherlin understood Mr. Ligon's emotional distress and in a comforting gesture embraced his friend in front of the crowd; and

WHEREAS, although it is hard to believe today, two men of different races hugging each other in public was a controversial event in those racially charged times prior to school integration; although some people reacted negatively, the men's act of friendship and compassion ultimately served as a catalyst for reducing racial tensions in the community and

promoting a greater appreciation of cultural differences among Black and white people alike;  
and

WHEREAS, an equally amazing fact is that no one knew of the two young men's friendship prior to that night; Mr. Sherlin and Mr. Ligon had first become friends while playing basketball at a Gallatin public park; because of the racial taboos of the day, both Mr. Ligon and Mr. Sherlin kept their friendship a secret from their family and friends to avoid criticism; and

WHEREAS, during the ensuing years, a friendship between two boys and an athletic competition involving two young men have forged a connection between Mr. Sherlin and Mr. Ligon that is still strong today; and

WHEREAS, this fascinating true story of two young men whose secret friendship was revealed by a public embrace after a sporting event has been chronicled by *New York Times* best-selling author Ken Abraham in his book *More Than Rivals*; and

WHEREAS, after the book's publication in 2016, hundreds of people packed the Palace Theatre in Gallatin for the official launch of *More Than Rivals*, during which event the author and Mr. Sherlin and Mr. Ligon spent hours signing copies of the book and posing for photographs with supporters and fans; and

WHEREAS, award-winning filmmaker, screenwriter, and actor Nick Castle was recently selected to direct the upcoming film version of *More Than Rivals*; and

WHEREAS, in an artistic homage closer to home, local artist Bryan Deese has painted a mural depicting the Sherlin-Ligon friendship and the inspirational *More Than Rivals* story on the exposed wall of a building in downtown Gallatin; and

WHEREAS, Eddie Sherlin played a vital role in moving Gallatin "beyond Black and white," and he is most worthy of our approbation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we honor Eddie Sherlin for helping to bring the people of Gallatin together through friendship and respect for others and pave the way for greater unity and understanding among Black and white Tennesseans. We also pay tribute to his outstanding accomplishments as a basketball star for Gallatin High School and extend to Mr. Sherlin our best wishes for much continued success and happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.